United States
Department of
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**Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service**

CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE SERVICES

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in California

Every day California residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on California Wildlife Services (WS) for its expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, professional, and selective strategies to resolve conflicts between humans and wildlife.

California is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forest, and desert environments. With more than 33 million residents, and a population growth rate higher than the national average, human interactions with wildlife are expected to increase over time as people encroach on both agricultural property and wildlife habitat.

WS biologists help California's livestock and fruit producers reduce losses from predators and birds. They address serious beaver damage to California's transportation infrastructure, crops, and other natural resources. WS also protect the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with aircraft. In addition, WS helps to protect many threatened or endangered species from other wildlife predators.

Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting sheep, cattle, goats, and poultry from predation
- Protecting row crops, vineyards, fruit, almonds, and other nut crops from birds and rodents
- Protecting aquaculture resources from predation by migratory birds
- Protecting public health through monitoring of plague, rabies, and other communicable wildlife diseases
- Protecting public safety against attacks and threats by mountain lions, black bears, and coyotes
- Protecting public health and safety from rabid animals
- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting levees and dams from muskrat and beaver burrowing
- Protecting turf from coots and other waterfowl
- Protecting Federal and State listed threatened and endangered species
- Protecting municipal utility districts from feral hog damage
- Reducing blackbird damage to sunflowers and feedlots
- Managing problems caused by vultures
- Managing bird damage to rice

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

In many cases, WS works with others to resolve wildlife conflicts through *technical assistance* by providing them with information, equipment, or advice. When the problem is relatively complex or beyond the scope of the individual, WS conducts *direct assistance* regarding wildlife at the damage site. WS also conducts *scientific research* across the nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife, and to ensure that WS utilizes state-of-the-art science and technology.

Protecting Air Travel—Experts estimate that bird strikes with airplanes cost the civil aviation industry more than $300 million annually in the United States. California has many of the country's busiest airports with 900,000 aircraft providing transportation to more than 17.5 million passengers annually. Many of California's airports are located along the coast in close proximity to the Pacific Flyway.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) continually conducts research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to control or prevent these hazards.

Applying this scientific expertise, the California WS program provided assistance to 17 airports in 2001, including technical assistance, training, and direct operational management. On-site evaluations, as well as comprehensive Wildlife Hazard Assessments were also completed.

Protecting Livestock from Predators—In addition to the many factors that cause economic hardships for livestock producers, predators like coyotes, bears, and mountain lions cause additional and sometimes significant losses by attacking sheep, cattle, and goats. It is estimated that in California and other Western States, about 75 percent of WS' cooperative agreements are with small farmers and ranchers. In 1999 the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed WS customers and found that, in California, these producers lost an estimated 16,700 head of livestock worth almost $2 million to predators. Research results suggest these figures could be 2 to 3 times higher in the absence of an effective livestock protection program.

NWRC is working hard to develop additional predator control methods. The center's research efforts on traps and snares has improved the selectivity of these tools. Pan-tension devices on traps and breakaway snares help ensure that only depredating animals are caught. NWRC is also working on developing a radio-activated Electronic Guard frightening device that activates when predators approach the device, preventing depredation. Another preventative method being researched is the use of llamas as alternatives to guard dogs for protecting sheep flocks from coyotes and other predators. As these and other methods are developed, they will be provided to field personnel and producers for their use.

Protecting Threatened or Endangered Species—Habitat destruction and human encroachment are long-term threats to California's large number of threatened or endangered species. Predators ranging from feral cats to nonnative species like red fox, and even native species like raccoons, coyotes, striped skunks, and raptors threaten these species.

In 2001, the California WS program was involved in 44 projects that protected nine threatened and endangered species, including six bird species, the California Red-legged frog, the salt marsh harvest mouse, and the Sierra Nevada big horn sheep. All projects resulted in the threatened and endangered species populations being maintained or increased. In fact, the Monterey Bay western snowy plover colony had an 85 percent hatching success rate with no documented predation for 2001.

Research Activities of Relevance to California:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation
- Inducing infertility as a wildlife management tool

Remaining Challenges

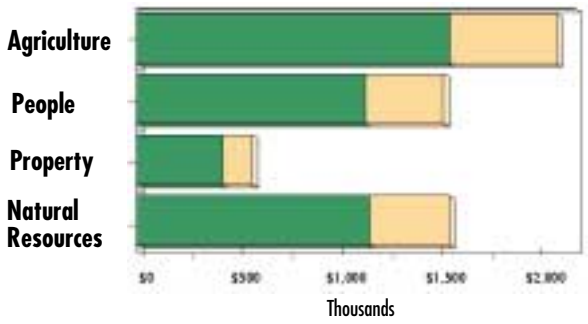
In California, public safety has become a growing concern for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Increased travel through California's airports, coupled with a growth in the population of many bird species, have created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife.

A second issue related to public safety involves the increased need to protect humans from large predators such as coyotes, black bears, and mountain lions. A recent surge in the number of attacks on humans has lead the California Department of Food and Agriculture to partner with WS to enhance the program's ability to rapidly respond to these dangerous wildlife encounters. In fiscal year 2001, WS personnel responded to approximately 3,100 requests for assistance where public health and safety were being threatened. WS can only ensure a fast, efficient, and professional response to these requests if the program has the appropriate tools and resources.

Fiscal Year 2001 Funding

WS operates a cooperatively funded program. In addition to federally allocated funds, the program also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; small businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators are in need of assistance to help resolve wildlife damage problems or they have an interest in wildlife damage management.

Funding By Resources Protected in California



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